

Waabinong Head Start Expansion

Monday, May 28

[AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY]

Good afternoon. Ahneen. Boozhoo. It's my pleasure to bring greetings to you today on behalf of the office of Mayor and Sault Ste. Marie City Council.

We are in Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and the land on which we are gathered is the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, I would like to begin by comments by recognizing this, and I also want to recognize the other speakers: Mike Nadeau, Sault Ste. Marie District Social Services CAO, Kevin Tegosh, Waabinong Head Start manager, Claudette Chevrier, Indigenous Friendship Centre President and Justin Marchand, Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services Executive Director.

Today's announcement of support for new child care and EarlyON programs for Indigenous children and families in Sault Ste. Marie is fantastic news, and it provides an opportunity for us to celebrate the community's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation and to re-affirm our dedication to righting the wrongs committed of residential schools.

Waabinong Head Start is an appropriate location for today's celebration. It offers programming for Indigenous preschool children and their families, including areas such as culture and language, education and school readiness, social support and parental and family involvement.

Whereas residential schools separated Indigenous children from their families in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture, places like Waabinong Head Start help make reconciliation a reality by preserving and promoting Indigenous culture in a welcoming learning environment designed to help students excel.

The students who have come through the doors here over the past 21 years provide examples of the success of this kind of programming, and the need to continue proving supporting moving forward.

The Truth and Reconciliation Committee's report calls on different levels of government and all Canadians to address the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of reconciliation by implementing 94 calls to action.

Child welfare, language and culture, education and health are all included in the calls to action, and it is good to see today's announcement further the implementation of measures to address these identified areas of concern. However, it is important to recognize there is still much work to be done.

As Justice Murray Sinclair said following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report: "We have described for you a mountain. We have shown you a path to the top. We call upon you to do the climbing."

Those are important words for all of us to take to heart, and they should inform our actions moving forward.

Reconciliation will take dedication, effort and time, but the recognition of the past and the establishment of a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is necessary.

It is necessary for survivors and victims of the residential school system. It is necessary because of the racism and systemic discrimination that still exists today. Thank you. Miigwetch.